

**Truth Stories and True Stories – June 22, 2025—By Rev. Whitney LP Bruno, Little Current United Church of Canada Pastoral Charge**

Last weekend I was away at the Festival of Faith. Rev. John Bell, famous hymn writer of the Iona Community, spoke there saying: “There are true stories, and there are truth stories.”

For instance, this is a true story: The first time I visited Canada was to Niagara Falls as a child. I spent the time surrounded by strangers taking photos of themselves with my dad – who they mistook as some guy named Kevin Bacon. Some asked for autographs – but didn’t seem to like reading “Steve Prose” so they’d tell him, “You don’t need to use an alias with me.” This is a true story. But is there a great truth to it? No, not really.

This is a truth story: Once upon a time, a woman lost her only son. She refused to believe he was dead and begged for the best doctors to give her a medicine to revive her son. She came to the world’s best doctor and laid her son at his feet, “Help me!” The best doctor said, “I will help you. Go into town and get a little mustard seed from a family who’s never known death.” With joy she went to town. Each house told her, “Of course we know someone who has died.” Eventually she realized there is no family, no home, that is untouched by mortality. All that is living, dies. She returned to the doctor ready to bury her son’s body and became a healer of souls herself. This is a truth story. It is a Buddhist story. It may or may not have literally happened. The truth of the story isn’t based on its historical accuracy.

We all have world views. The modern dominate world view around us is that things are fictional, or non-fictional. True, or false. It means when we approach the story of Jesus encountering a legion of demons and casting them into pigs, and then the pigs off into the sea, we have to say “Yes, this literally happened like this.” Or, we have to say “This is all made up and fake.” There isn’t room in this world view for truth stories. Only true stories.

In other ways of viewing the world there is more awareness that truth doesn’t have to be true. In the ancient Hebrew world what literally did or didn’t happen was not nearly as important as the meaning of what happened.

As a True Story, Jesus murdering a bunch of pigs is pretty distressing. As a True Story, St. Augustine concluded Christians have no duties towards animals, writing: “Christ himself shows that to refrain from the killing of animals and the destroying of plants is the height of superstition, for judging that there are no common rights between us and the beasts and trees, he sent the devils into a herd of swine and with a curse withered the tree on which he found no fruit.” And for 1600 years people have parroted Augustine and argued against care for nature, and animals.

As a Truth Story, there’s much to unpack. Legion means both a huge number, and is the name of a Roman army. Pigs are both unclean to Jews but clean to Gentiles; and are the symbol of a particularly violent Roman army that destroyed the very area named. Abyss is both an abstract nothingness and the deepest dark of the sea. The occupied, possessed man is found among graves and liberated, freed and brought back to live in community. He begins with violence and hate. He ends with peace and love.

As a Truth story, this isn’t Jesus murdering a bunch of animals callously. This is a story of hope, a story of how Jesus can liberate not just those occupied by supernatural woes, but also those occupied by foreigners. Whether a touchable or a not-touchable demon – Jesus can toss your countless oppressors into the abyss and free you. Racism? Not touchable. Still – into the abyss it goes. War-loving president? Touchable. Jesus could toss them into the abyss too. This is a warning to the powerful and hope for the powerless. As a truth story, this story speaks of the truth of what a life with Christ is, and what kind of power Christ has. All principalities and powers, all demons in human flesh or pig flesh or without flesh, are less powerful than the love of God. God is the strongest. God’s love prevails.

Indigenous stories are often judged by modern Western European and North American world views as true, or not true. There’s no asking about if this is a truth story. Bell shared the same situation happens in his native Scotland. Celtic culture, like ancient Hebrew culture, and most Indigenous cultures, are less concerned about how historically accurate a story is, and more concerned about the truth of the story. This

isn't that historical truth is ignored and not valued – but rather, something doesn't have to have happened historically to have value.

Intuitively, we all understand this. We understand the value of say... the artwork in here is not that Jesus looked exactly like that. Just like that – made of 2 or 3 colours, flat as can be, cold. If you want to know Jesus, there you are. He is a motionless flat sheet of coloured glass. We know! We know the truth of the art is not that it is literal, but that it points to a greater truth. The greater truth is this is how some have encountered Jesus. This is a reminder of how we have encountered Jesus. These are stories we value and share. The artwork is not literally Jesus, and doesn't work like a 2000 year old paparazzi photograph.

So why do we hold other's sacred stories to a different standard than our own?

True stories and truth stories can overlap. In seminary, we called this "thinking theologically." It's where we consider the deep truth witnessed in a true event; or we find the true event spoken to in a truth story.

Consider another true story: I went to visit a congregation member who was unable to get out of bed. He was always very polite but distant. Distracted. True.

The truth part is his heart and soul were longing to leave this world. He wanted to go home. His heavenly home. I felt my visiting distressed him because he had to pretend to care about this world's affairs for a bit. But his family really wanted me over for them – and to say a prayer with their loved one.

True: One day I went with my 18 month old baby. When I came in to his room his old eyes lit up with surprise. He watched as baby toddler Selena came to his bed, gripped the sheets, and pulled herself up into bed. I watched with shock as she laid her head on his shoulder, curled into him, and promptly took a nap. He smiled. A big smile. A trembling smile. Then he closed his eyes and napped with her.

Truth: I sat in silence with them watching bookends of 100 years sleeping so happily and peacefully together. She ministered more than I ever could with just her presence.

Presence is healing. Jesus frequently ministers with presence – going to those who are alone – and reestablishing community around them.

This is how true stories have deeper truths.

So now, a truth story we'll look for historical truth within: All the prophets of YHWH were murdered by the Queen but a few who escaped. One of these was named Elijah. Elijah challenged the Queen's prophets of Ba'al. Each called on their god to cause an altar to catch on fire with fire from heaven. Ba'al did not. YHWH did. So the people listened to Elijah and murdered all the prophets of Ba'al. The Queen has now ordered Elijah killed within a day.

Elijah has fled from the realm. And fled from the neighbouring realm into the desert. There, he collapses under a bush and begs God to kill him because it is all too much. Then he takes a nap. An angel wakes Elijah up and offers him food and drink. And he naps again. An angel wakes him again and says, "It's too much, so eat and drink more." And Elijah does.

With a rest, with food, with water, with God's comfort – the too much journey becomes not too much. He is able to do the spiritual and physical journey through the wilderness to God's mountain. There he encounters not "a cave" but the Hebrew is "THE cave." THE cave that Moses knew. THE cave that now Elijah knows. THE cave of the 10 commandments. THE cave of encountering God.

Isaiah had prophesied: (29:4-6) "And you will be brought low; from the earth you shall speak, and from the dust your speech will be bowed down; your voice shall come from the ground like the voice of a ghost, and from the dust your speech shall whisper. But the multitude of your foreign foes shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the ruthless like passing chaff. And in an instant, suddenly, you will be visited by the Lord of hosts with thunder and with earthquake and great noise, with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire."

And as prophesied – there is wind, and earthquake, and fire – and a still small voice. A whisper. A ghostly barely heard voice.

"Why are you here, Elijah?"

“I’m on the lam, God. I think I’m the last person left faithful to you.”

“Go, Elijah. These are the new leaders to anoint. And the person who continue on your prophetic work.”

As a truth story – because there were no news reporters there detailing a play-by-play record of this encounter – what do we learn? What are the many layers of truth and insight of this tale? Some possible truths include

- God provides
- We encounter God when we’re knocked low as dust
- Sometimes we need a nap, water, and a honey cake is enough to make “too much” bearable
- God is with us in the chaos, but is not the chaos
- Murdering the Queen’s prophets after humiliating them isn’t how to get on her good side
- God understands getting tired and needing to lift up new leaders to carry on our work as we retire
- \_\_\_\_\_ Fill in truths you notice

True – archaeology has found the name of King Ahab inscribed in war monuments. Ahab is Queen Jezebel’s husband. Jehu, too, is accounted for in archaeology. And Hazael! But no Elijah or Elisha. Prophets, unlike kings, don’t have a bunch of monuments to their names. But we can confirm that at one time in history these kings existed in this part of the world, and in this chronological order of kingship.

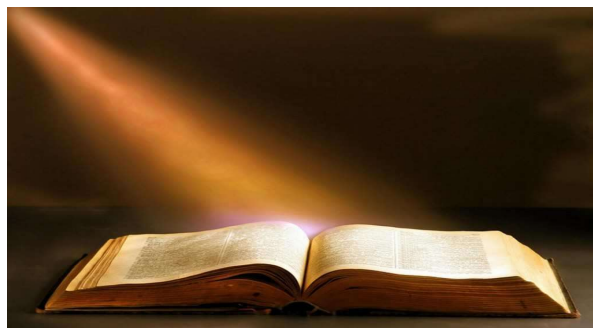
There can be deep truth in true stories if we think theologically about them and ask ‘Where is God? What is God doing? What does this say about who God is?’ These are valuable stories.

And there can be historically true facts in truth stories such as historical people, places, or events which we can find with various sciences. These are valuable stories.

And there can be true stories with no deeper truth. These are valuable stories.

And there can be truth stories with no historical basis. These are valuable stories.

May we not be so quick to judge stories’ worth based on their historical accuracy. May we be open to the deep truths found in each culture, tradition and religion. May we be open to the voice of God who speaks in many ways including in silence. May we be a people who can claim our truths while leaving room in our minds and souls that our truths are not the only truths in the world. Amen.



## **Scripture Readings – June 22, 2025 – LCUCPC**

### **1 Kings 19:1-15a - NRSV Ue Elijah Flees from Jezebel**

<sup>1</sup> 19 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup> Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” <sup>3</sup> Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

<sup>4</sup> But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die, “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.” <sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, “Get up and eat.” <sup>6</sup> He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. He ate and drank and lay down again. <sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, “Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you.” <sup>8</sup> He got up and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. <sup>9</sup> At that place he came to a cave and spent the night there. Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” <sup>10</sup> He answered, “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.”

### **Elijah Meets God at Horeb**

<sup>11</sup> He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind, and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake, <sup>12</sup> and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire, and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. <sup>13</sup> When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” <sup>14</sup> He answered, “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” <sup>15</sup> Then the LORD said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram.”

### **Luke 8:26-39 Jesus Heals the Gerasene Demoniac**

<sup>26</sup> Then they arrived at the region of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. <sup>27</sup> As he stepped out on shore, a man from the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had not worn any clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. <sup>28</sup> When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him, shouting, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me,” <sup>29</sup> for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) <sup>30</sup> Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” He said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him. <sup>31</sup> They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

<sup>32</sup> Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding, and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. <sup>33</sup> Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd stampeded down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

<sup>34</sup> When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. <sup>35</sup> Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they became frightened. <sup>36</sup> Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. <sup>37</sup> Then the whole throng of people of the surrounding region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. <sup>38</sup> The man from whom the demons had gone out begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, <sup>39</sup> “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

May God’s spirit shape our understanding of these words.

**And may they awaken in our hearts.**